

## CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for processing coupons by a self checkout system, wherein the self checkout system comprises at least one self checkout station coupled to a server, the method comprising:

(a) receiving a coupon from a customer by one of the at least one self checkout stations;

(b) attempting to validate the coupon against at least one item scanned by the customer; and

(c) storing the coupon in a coupon pool at the server if the coupon fails to validate against the at least one item, such that the stored coupon can be utilized at a subsequent sales transaction.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the coupon is a paper coupon and the storing step (c) further comprises:

(c1) converting the paper coupon into an electronic coupon;

(c2) transmitting the electronic coupon from the one self checkout station to the server; and

(c3) destroying the paper coupon.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein storing step (c) further comprises:

(c1) converting the paper coupon into an electronic coupon;

(c2) collecting tracking information related to the coupon and storing the tracking

information in a file at the server; and

(c3) storing the coupon in a global pool at the server, wherein the global pool is accessible by all customers.

5                   4.       The method of claim 3 further comprising:

(d) allowing a second customer in the subsequent sales transaction to utilize the coupon in the global pool.

5.       The method of claim 4, wherein the allowing step (d) further comprises:

10               (d1) searching the global pool for a coupon that validates against an item scanned by the second customer during the subsequent sales transaction; and

(d2) deducting a value of the coupon from a price of the item if the coupon and the item are validated.

15               6.       The method of claim 1, wherein storing step (c) further comprises:

(c1) storing the coupon in a personal pool at the server, wherein the personal pool is associated with the customer.

7.       The method of claim 3 further comprising:

20               (d) accessing the global pool at the server by the customer;

(e) selecting at least one coupon in the global pool; and

(f) transferring the selected coupon to a personal account at the server.

8. The method of claim 3 further comprising:

- (d) receiving the tracking information in the file by an item manufacturer;
- (e) accessing the global pool at the server by the item manufacturer;
- (f) selecting at least one coupon in the global pool;
- (g) analyzing the tracking information for the selected coupon; and
- (h) modifying the selected coupon.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein the modifying step (h) further comprising:

- (h1) modifying a price of the item based on the analysis.

10. The method of claim 9, further comprising:

- (i) implementing the modified price immediately via an electronic shelf label associated with the item.

11. The method of claim 8 wherein the modifying step (h) further comprising:

- (h1) modifying an expiration date of the selected coupon.

12. A computer readable medium containing program instructions for processing coupons by a self checkout system, wherein the self checkout system comprises at least one self checkout station coupled to a server, the program instructions for:

- (a) receiving a coupon from the customer by one of the at least one self checkout stations;
- (b) attempting to validate the coupon against at least one item scanned by the

customer at the one self checkout station; and

(c) storing the coupon in a coupon pool at the server if the coupon fails to validate against the at least one item, such that the stored coupon can be utilized at a subsequent sales transaction.

5

13. The computer readable medium of claim 12, wherein the coupon is a paper coupon and the storing instruction (c) further comprises:

(c1) converting the paper coupon into an electronic coupon;

(c2) transmitting the electronic coupon from the one self checkout station to the server; and

(c3) destroying the paper coupon.

14. The computer readable medium of claim 12, wherein storing instruction (c) further comprises:

(c1) converting the paper coupon into an electronic coupon;

(c2) collecting tracking information related to the coupon and storing the tracking information in a file at the server; and

(c3) storing the coupon in a global pool at the server, wherein the global pool is accessible by all customers.

20

15. The computer readable medium of claim 14 further comprising:

(d) allowing a second customer in the subsequent sales transaction to utilize the coupon in the global pool.

16. The computer readable medium of claim 15, wherein the following instruction (d) further comprises:

(d1) searching the global pool for a coupon that validates against an item scanned by the second customer during the subsequent sales transaction; and

5 (d2) deducting a value of the coupon from a price of the item if the coupon and the item are validated.

17. The computer readable medium of claim 12, wherein storing instruction (c) further comprises:

10 (c1) storing the coupon in a personal pool at the server, wherein the personal pool is associated with the customer.

18. The computer readable medium of claim 14 further comprising:

(d) accessing the global pool at the server by the customer;

15 (e) selecting at least one coupon in the global pool; and

(f) transferring the selected coupon to a personal account at the server.

19. The computer readable medium of claim 14 further comprising:

(d) receiving the tracking information in the file by an item manufacturer;

20 (e) accessing the global pool at the server by the item manufacturer;

(f) selecting at least one coupon in the global pool;

(g) analyzing the tracking information for the selected coupon; and

(h) modifying the selected coupon.

20. The computer readable medium of claim 19 wherein the modifying instruction (h) further comprising:

(h1) modifying a price of the item based on the analysis.

21. The computer readable medium of claim 20, further comprising:

(i) implementing the modified price immediately via an electronic shelf label associated with the item.

22. The method of claim 19 wherein the modifying instruction (h) further comprising:

(h1) modifying an expiration date of the selected coupon.

23. A self checkout system comprising:

a server for managing the self checkout system; and

at least one self checkout station coupled to the server, wherein the at least one self checkout station comprises:

a scanner for scanning at least one item for purchase by a customer;

a coupon reader for receiving a coupon from the customer; and

a coupon manager for validating the coupon against the at least one item scanned by the customer, wherein if the coupon fails to validate, the coupon manager stores the coupon in a coupon pool at the server such that the stored coupon can be utilized at a subsequent sales transaction.

24. The self checkout system of claim 23, wherein the server comprises a global pool for storing the unvalidated coupon, wherein the global pool is accessible by all customers.

5 25. The self checkout system of claim 24, wherein the server further comprises communication means for allowing a customer or item manufacturer to access the global pool.